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SUBJECT: CUBA, DEPORTEES AND SECURITY TOP AGENDA IN
AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL CALLS IN ST. VINCENT

Classified By: CDA D. Brent Hardt, Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

¶1. (C) During the Ambassador's January 8 farewell call on St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves, he called on the U.S. to unconditionally end its economic embargo on Cuba. PM Gonsalves spoke at length about the deep, strong ties that bind the United States and the Caribbean, uncharacteristically rebuking Bolivian President Morales for lacking basic pragmatism. The Ambassador thanked Gonsalves for his efforts to work with the U.S. to combat drug trafficking and money laundering and strengthen regional security. She also reaffirmed expanding U.S. support for combating HIV/AIDS in the region. End Summary.

Security, Crime and Deportees

¶2. (C) In a friendly and warm farewell call on January 8, the Ambassador highlighted the importance of close security cooperation between the U.S. and the Eastern Caribbean to address the growing threats of crime and violence. The Ambassador emphasized the U.S. desire to help the region implement its own security solutions with our support. The United States does not seek to impose solutions on the region, she noted, but wanted regional leaders to take the lead. The Ambassador invited the GOSVG to participate in security training programs onboard the USNS Swift in Barbados in January and March 2009. Gonsalves expressed his gratitude to the Ambassador for her consistent support on security issues, and assured her the GOSVG will take advantage of the training opportunities.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador also congratulated the PM on the efforts of SVG's newly formed Financial Investigations Unit (FIU). The Ambassador singled out for strong praise the unit's recent success in charging a high-value DEA suspect with money laundering and the FIU's strong cooperation with the Embassy's regional DEA office. Gonsalves explained that he believed SVG's FIU to be the best in the region, noting that he looks forward to even better cooperation in the future as his unit becomes more seasoned. Gonsalves highlighted the need for better cooperation in processing and transitioning criminal deportees back into Caribbean society. However, as his government also deports third country nationals convicted of crimes in St. Vincent, he admitted that he cannot blame the United States when it does the same to his citizens when they are convicted of a crime in the U.S.

Gonsalves and Morales at Bahia Summit

14. (c) Asked about the Bahia Summit in Brazil, Gonsalves noted that the Caribbean has a relationship with the United States that is unbreakable, "despite our episodic differences." He added that Bolivian President Morales is "not a mature man," and that, despite their personal friendship, he had to bring Morales back to reality at the summit by reminding the participants that the role and presence of the U.S. in the region is a reality that cannot be ignored.

Cuba and U.S. Role in the Region

15. (c) Gonsalves stayed on message as he addressed his government's position on Cuba, emphasizing that CARICOM would like to see the U.S. end its embargo. He said that he and his colleagues were hopeful that the new administration would take a different approach with Cuba. After his latest visit to Havana, he noted, it was his sense that there is a genuine desire to regularize relations with the U.S. (Note: Gonsalves was in Cuba on December 8, 2008 attending the CARICOM-Cuba Summit. End note.) Gonsalves called on the U.S. to move to end the economic embargo without conditions, adding that "the change that you will find in the Cuban society will be unmistakable." The

Ambassador reassured the PM that the United States stands ready to take a fresh look at relations with Cuba, but pointed out that there has to be real, sustained democratic change in that country for rapprochement to take place. Releasing political prisoners, she noted, would be a clear

gesture of the regime's sincerity. This is an area where the other nations of the Caribbean could be particularly helpful, she pointed out. If they sincerely hoped to see a change, encouraging Cuba to do the right thing on political prisoners would be the best way to promote movement in that direction.

Praise for HIV/AIDS Work

16. (C) The Ambassador reaffirmed United States support for efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, and explained that the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program would soon include a first-ever regional program, which would be supported in part from our Embassy in Barbados. PM Gonsalves thanked the Ambassador for the work the USG has done to combat the spread of HIV and was particularly grateful for her efforts to ensure that the small island states of the EC receive U.S. support and attention as well as larger regional neighbors.

Comment

17. (C) Gonsalves was effusively appreciative of the Ambassador's efforts during her tenure to forge a stronger relationship with St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Gonsalves, decision to start the meeting off by emphasizing the "unbreakable" nature of the U.S.-Caribbean relationship coupled with his obvious desire to distance himself from Morales and Chavez, may be an indication that he took to heart the strong concerns we voiced over his letter to CARICOM PM's earlier this year. The PM's comments in favor of ending the embargo on Cuba echo identical comments from all the PM's in the region in recent weeks. It would appear that, coming out of the December 8 meeting in Havana, they agreed to emphasize a unified message calling for complete, unconditional normalization of U.S.-Cuba relations) which has long been the Caribbean position. This unity is notable since the leaders of the Eastern Caribbean are rarely this unified about any international issue. While many of our rank-and-file MFA contacts in the region question the

utility of choosing Cuba as the first issue on which to engage the new administration, since it brings no tangible benefits, they concede that many of the leaders in the EC hold solidarity with Cuba as a sort of banner of their sovereignty and solidarity with their long lionized Caribbean neighbor.

HARDT